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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether the choice of literature read aloud by the teacher affected childrens' choices of books in their free reading. Subjects, 13 third grade students, freely selected library books before the study, and then were asked to make choices each week during the 11 weeks of the study in order to determine if the genre being read to the children affected their choices. The teacher read aloud for 10 to 15 minutes each day. Stories read were from traditional literature including myths, legends, fables, and folk-fairy tales. Results seemed to indicate a slight, but not statistically significant, influence. (Two tables of data are included and 36 references are attached.) (SR)

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THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' CHOICE OF LITERATURE READ ALOUD ON STUDENTS' FREE READING CHOICES

BY,

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accepted
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ABSTRACT

Teachers read certain literature aloud because they feel that their choice will be appropriate for the children involved.

A study was made to try to determine whether the choice of literature read aloud by the teacher effected choices of books by children in their free reading. Students freely selected library books before the study, and then were asked to make choices each week during the eleven weeks of the study in order to determine if the genre being read to the children effected their choices.

The teacher read aloud for ten to fifteen minutes each day at the beginning of the one hour reading lesson. Stories read were from traditional literature including myths, legends, fables, and folk-fairy tales. Interactive discussion designed to increase comprehension was necessary sometimes when myths, legends and fables were read.

It would seem that there was a slight, but not statistically significant influence. It would be impossible to say from this study that there would be any long term change in pupil choices of books to read.

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Teachers choose certain literature to read aloud to children because they feel that their choice will be appropriate for the children involved. Literature is writing that gives both pleasure and understanding. It explores the nature of human beings and the condition of humankind. Traditional literature is anonymous, has no final or definitive form, and expresses the universality of human wishes and needs. (Lukens,1986). Folktales are traditional literature with flat characters, fast action and often recurring images. Fables are usually very brief, with animal characters that express a moral. Myths are stories that originate in the folk beliefs of nations and races and have supernatural forces which interpret natural phenomena.

Most teachers are aware of the importance of reading aloud to children to develop language, awareness of print, listening skills, schema, and cultural awareness. Trelease (1989), and Schlesinger (1979), suggest these benefits, but emphasize the pleasant aspects of reading aloud to children for the adult and the child, and the teaching that reading is a pleasure, which is learned naturally while listening to oral reading. Children tend to choose certain topics, or genre, in their free reading. These choices are influenced by interests, and familiarity. Children are not likely to choose books that don't fit into their schema in some way. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that the teacher's choice of literature will develop a child's own experience in some way, so as to effect the child's choice in his or her

own free reading.

When teachers model their enthusiasm for certain types of literature by reading them aloud, they assume they are influencing children's likes and dislikes. If they do influence the choices children make, teachers then have a responsibility to read significant stories and books to develop a wide appreciation of different types of literature because this is an important part of the development of a reader and of a culturally literate adult.

It is commonly accepted (Anderson, 1985) that reading begins in the home. Wide experiences develop a necessary knowledge base and reading aloud helps develop an understanding of the function of print, listening skills and develops language. In her study, Carol Chomsky (1972) found a strong correlation between reading exposures and language development. Language acquisition between the ages of six and ten was studied, and how that acquisition related to exposure to written language. Language was learned naturally by independent reading, and listening to books read aloud. Children who read or listened to a variety of rich and complex material benefited from language input not available to a non-literary child.

Children choose different topics to read at different ages and stages. Stahlschmidt (1984) says high interest is the number one reason children give for the books they chose.

Teachers influence children by interacting (Rumelhart 1984) with reading material to increase comprehension. Parents and teachers influence by modelling reading.

Koeller (1981) reviewed articles in The Reading Teacher for 25 years, and said that there has been a recurring theme that educators should be concerned with habits not skills. There is a positive relationship between the number of books read and reading comprehension. She went on to say that teachers should read good books aloud in all grades to help develop good habits and comprehension.

J. Chall, at the annual International Reading Association convention in May, 1989 (Aaron, 1990), said that students now need a reading literacy level sufficient for the end of High School. Hirsch (1987) says that schools should be teaching knowledge, not skills. He says that culturally literate people have a deep understanding of mainstream culture. He feels that if in the early grades texts had cultural content, rather than developmental material, much of the knowledge deficit of disadvantaged students could be overcome. Diakiw (1990) says that children should deal with issues of poverty, famine and economic development. He feels that children's literature is a powerful tool to help children learn of the world that is far from their reality.

It has been assumed that if interest is kindled in a genre of literature, that it will be evidenced by the students choosing that type of literature in their free

reading. Research on this topic is equivocal, yet authorities believe that interest kindled will carry over to reading or continued reading of a genre. This research will attempt to find out if a teacher's oral reading will influence third grade students' choice of genre in their free reading.

Hypothesis

To provide additional evidence concerning this topic, a study was conducted with the hypothesis that the literature genre which teachers read aloud would not effect the choice of genre chosen by third graders in their free reading.

Procedures

Thirteen third grade students from one reading group reading on grade level in an upper socioeconomic suburban school district comprised the sample for the study.

Students were read to for ten to fifteen minutes each day at the beginning of their one hour reading class during a three month period. During the first month myths were read. During the second month fables were read, and during the third month folk tales were read to the students.

During the reading time, the story was read and followed by a limited interactive discussion designed to increase comprehension.

Prior to the onset of the teacher's oral reading of genre

literature students were taken to the library and asked to choose a book to read. The students were told that no restrictions would be placed on their choices and that no reports would be required. They were asked to list their names and book choices.

The class was then taken to the library once each week during the eleven week period of the study to choose a book, and record their choices. The author then attempted to determine if the teacher's choice of topic influenced the students enough that they chose myths, fables or folktales when they could choose any book in the library to read by an examination and categorization of the numerous texts chosen by the individual children during the eleven week period.

Results

Although thirteen children participated in this study, because of absence during the period, there was an average of 12.27 children each week making the book selections. They made a total of 135 book choices during the 11 week period or one book per child per week.

Table I shows the genre divisions, the number of books chosen in each before the study began, and the average number chosen in each genre during the period of study compared to the baseline.

Table I

Chi Square Test of Significance

Treatment	Observed	Expected
1. Adventure	1.00	1.0
2. Fantasy	1.45	1.0
3. Mystery	1.36	2.0
4. Non-fiction	4.45	6.0
5. Poetry	0.54	1.0
6. Realistic Fiction	1.72	2.0
7. Traditional	1.72	0.0 ** Excluded from calculations

Chi Square = 1.059 of 5 Probability .96

A chi square test on the data indicate the observed changes for six of the seven categories was not significant. Computer program exclusion of genre seven, on the basis of no choice originally, does not permit statistical analysis of the seventh category. However, it should be noted that an average of 1.7 children chose a book of a similar nature to that used in reading to the class during this period.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study confirm the hypothesis that the literature genre which teachers read aloud would not effect the choice of genre chosen by third graders in their free reading. Thus the hypothesis is accepted.

According to studies third grade girls usually prefer mystery, romance, home and school and fairytales, and boys usually prefer adventure, science, sports and information (Iarusso, 1989). These children did seem to follow that pattern.

Sports information and biography predominated in the non-fiction category. The group was nine boys and four girls. Many of the boys, however, may have been influenced by two boys who are very knowledgable, talented and enthusiastic about sports.

Results were possibly affected by an additional weekly trip to the school library made by the students during their homeroom classes. Such additional selections, not available to the researcher, could have been made and this might have indicated more selection of traditional stories.

It appears that the teacher's reading affected the students' choices to a small extent and might continue to affect them since the children are now more familiar with the traditional genre and children do tend to choose books with which they are familiar. However, it is also possible that fewer such choices will be made since their interest in the

genre could be exhausted, or other curricular and experiential interests could affect their choices. Only a follow-up study would show this.

Teachers who understand the value of reading aloud to their students should be aware that the choice of books to be read is a significant one. Although this study does not show a significant affect from the teacher's choice of genre, it is clear from other studies that students choose literature that is familiar. Therefore those books read to students should be carefully chosen to lead to a broad familiarity with a wide variety of genre to encourage the love of reading among students with widely varied interests and talents. The study results are interesting enough to examine further. A carefully controlled study with a wider group of children over a longer period of time might yield results that would be more definitive in guiding teachers in their choice of literature to be read aloud.

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' CHOICE OF LITERATURE READ ALOUD ON STUDENTS' FREE READING CHOICES

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Importance of Reading and of Reading Aloud

Jim Trelease (1989) says that a society that doesn't read suffers in choices made in the voting booth, how time and money are spent, how children are raised, its value system and who it emulates. So, for children who choose not to read, he feels we must plant the desire. This desire is best planted by showing the pleasure of reading through regular oral reading.

Children usually start school eager to learn to read, and somewhere in the process of learning skills, some children become apathetic and unmotivated. They are aliterate, not illiterate. They can read, but do not wish to do so. Dr. Nicholas Criscuolo believes that there are many reasons for this. They include: too much stress on reading skill, and not enough on enjoyment, lack of parental support, lack of free reading time in school, too much emphasis on texts instead of a wide variety of books, and not enough books easily available at home or school (Criscuolo 1991).

Others blame sophisticated electronics in the home including TV, VCR, Nintendo, Walkman, stereos. Next to these books seem painfully dull and slow. Even some well educated adults wonder what is the point of reading books when they can get the point through a summary or a computer (Cohen 1991).

According to Hirsch (1987) the basic principle

underlying national education is that people in a democracy can be entrusted to decide all important matters for themselves because they can deliberate with each other. A reader who doesn't have knowledge presumed in a piece is illiterate for that piece of writing. If he is unable to read, he would be unable to perform the duties expected of a citizen in a culturally literate society. Knowing what other literate people probably know is essential for effective communication.

The essence of the education of children, (Hirsch 1987) is to teach the ways of their community. The mastery of their national culture is essential and requires mastery of the standard language. The connection between mainstream culture and the national written language justifies calling mainstream culture the basic culture of the nation.

In Becoming A Nation of Readers Anderson (1985) says that reading, comprehending and thinking with language and the printed word are cultural phenomenon. The extent of the development of these skills depends on encouragement from home and school.

Chomsky (1972) found in her study a strong correlation between reading exposure and language development. She says that children exposed to a wide variety of rich and complex materials benefit from a range of linguistic experience unavailable to a nonliterary child. She suggests that the best thing to do for a young child is to expose the child to

a rich variety of language inputs in interesting and stimulating situations. The child acquires language naturally while maturing and developing when there is adequate exposure. This acquisition continues actively in early school years. Chomsky's conclusion is that the variety of linguistic material should be extensive. Her results indicate to her that exposure to more complex language from reading seems to go hand in hand with increased language knowledge. So wide reading belongs in the curriculum and not just restricted to material at the child's reading level or apparent maturational level.

Anderson (1985) says that reading depends on wide knowledge, and that the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children. Trelease (1989) says that reading aloud strengthens reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension. Haney (1988) in the summary of her study says that reading orally to children was found to whet children's appetites for reading.

McCormick (1987) also found that reading aloud strengthened reading performance, reading interest and language development. She noted that better results were obtained when children were read to over longer periods of time, and concluded that since her research provided a direct relationship between reading aloud and reading success, reading aloud should be regular.

Reading aloud is returning to favor partly due to its endorsement by the Commission on Reading in Becoming A Nation of Readers (Anderson 1985), and from other researchers and authors. But it is not universal. LaPointe (1986), director of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, says that just over half of fourth grade teachers said they read aloud to their students four or more times per week. In another study by Stahlschmidt and Johnson (1984) teachers of kindergarten through grade six were surveyed about their read aloud habits. Of the one hundred thirteen respondents, over ninety-six percent of the teachers reported that they did read aloud, and ninety-three percent said they read daily or two to three times a week. One hundred percent of the teachers said they used the library/media center to obtain books.

Martinez and Teale (1988) showed that reading aloud is effective advertisement for reading. Researchers observed a class with a good classroom library and a teacher who read aloud daily. There were three kinds of books available: very familiar (read often by the teacher), familiar (read once), and unfamiliar (unread). Researchers found that children chose very familiar books three times more often, and familiar ones two times as often as unfamiliar books. Also, children were likely to "read" the very familiar and familiar, and just browse the unfamiliar ones.

Morrow (1983) studied kindergarten classrooms to

determine why children had high or low interest in literature. Questionnaires to the parents concerned television viewing habits, the availability of books in the home, parents' reading habits, and whether they read aloud to their children or not. Children who had a high interest in literature were read to more often, watched less television and had more books in the home.

The Importance of Reading Good Literature Aloud

Today parents and teachers talk about reading the "classics" and there seems to be a consensus that reading classic literature is an important way to stimulate interest in reading. However many recognize the inappropriateness of some classics (Wilson and Abrahamson, 1988). A study was conducted of fifth and sixth graders. Classics were chosen that met the definition of having weathered at least one generation, and that were included on three out of four major library selection lists. Four sets of the twenty-seven classics were sent to nine schools. Students were encouraged to read three or more classics during the four month study and freely selected their choices. Students rated the books, and those who had read three or more classics voted on their "favorite classic of all time". Charlotte's Web, The Borrowers, and The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe were the all time classic favorites. In concluding this study Wilson suggests that we be careful in choosing classics to read to

children, or to recommend to them, to be sure they are books that other children have enjoyed recently (Wilson 1985). It is well to keep in mind Mark Twain's comment that "A classic is a book which people praise but don't read". Children's interests have changed over the last one hundred years, as shown by many studies.

Bettelheim (1976) emphasizes that life must be meaningful for children as well as adults. He says that the first impact on children is from parent and/or care-giver, and the second is the cultural heritage. He says that most children's literature is designed to entertain or inform, but has no significance, and is shallow. He says the acquisition of reading skill is devalued if what is read adds nothing to the meaning of life. Children should gain from literature. It should give access to deeper meanings that are meaningful at each stage of development. He goes on to say that to hold a child's attention the material must entertain and arouse curiosity. To enrich life the material must stimulate imagination, develop intellect and clarify emotions. It should respond to a child's anxieties and aspirations, recognize difficulties and suggest solutions to disturbing problems.

Nothing is as enriching as the folk fairy tale (Bettelheim 1976). Chall (1967) agrees that folktales and fairytales are good for children as shown by their universal appeal. Bettelheim says that fairy tales help children

learn about the inner problems of humans, and solutions to their predicaments. They also offer a subtle moral education because they teach that crime doesn't pay, and that perseverance may lead to solutions, among other lessons. Fairy tales offer temporary and/or permanent solutions to agonizing problems. Schlesinger (1979) agrees that the serious point of children's books is not to improve behavior but expand imagination. Great literature creates a world the child enters with delight and from which he returns with insights and reflections that his own experience couldn't have produced. It helps the child find meaning in his own life experiences. It introduces children to the mysteries of life: anxiety, loneliness, the need for friendship, struggles, victory and death (Schlesinger 1979).

Schlesinger and Bettelheim agree that this starts with fairy tales for the young child and progresses to the Greek myths. These stories tell the child that human nature is not innately good, that conflict is real and that life may be harsh before it is happy. These facts reassure a child about his own fears. All this is sustained in compelling narrative, in great literature. C.S.Lewis says that no book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty.

Bettelheim feels it is important to provide modern children with images of heroes. Fairy tales and folk tales

do that. Children associate with the hero. Trelease (1989) says that if you want children to remain civilized, you must teach love, justice, courage and compassion, and that reading good literature is one of the best ways. Fairy tales, according to Bettelheim, are the result of common conscious and unconscious content shaped by the consensus of many as to what they view as universal problems and desirable solutions. If this were not so, they wouldn't be retold by so many generations.

Both myths and fairy tales answer questions as to what the world is really like. Myths have definite answers. Their message is that this story is unique, not for ordinary mortals. Endings are often tragic and they have a pessimistic feel. Fairy tales are suggestive. The events are presented as ordinary happenings that could happen to anyone. The ending is happy and the feeling optimistic (Bettelheim 1976).

Hirsch (1987) says that if, in the early grades, texts had cultural content rather than developmental content designed to develop abstract skills, much of the knowledge deficit of the disadvantaged could be overcome. He says that background knowledge doesn't take care of itself, so that by grade four reading can be increasingly difficult and a student left behind permanently. He feels that teaching critical thinking and basic skills doesn't give names and concepts that are needed. Cultural content, at early ages,

means accumulating shared symbols and shared information mostly through literature.

Wide experiences and knowledge (Anderson 1985) are essential for reading. Fairy tales, folk tales, fables and myths provide the cultural content (Hirsch 1987), and help develop language (Chomsky 1972), and the background knowledge (Schlesinger 1979), (Bettelheim 1976), (Chomsky 1972) all necessary for the early development of a culturally literate person.

Genre of Children's Choices

Children's literature is as varied as adult literature. Some types are: poetry, realism, fantasy, traditional tales, nonfiction, etc. These and others are the genre in literature. Genres are not always clear-cut, so the terms are often seen as arbitrary (Lukens 1986).

Classics are books that have attracted readers from one generation to another. They cross all genre lines. The appeal seems to be a significant theme, credible character, continuing reality of the conflict, or the style (Lukens 1986). Great literature provides pleasure and understanding.

Children who are avid readers come from homes in which reading is encouraged (Anderson 1985). Once children learn to read for themselves they were eager to read the same books or the same types of books that had been read to them (Mason and Blanton 1971). Young children choose what is familiar

(Trelease 1989). High interest is the number one reason for selecting books (Stahlschmist 1984).

What children read with interest is rewarding and may lead to further reading. What children read without interest may assist skills but impede attitude (Byers 1964).

It is interesting to note some of the reasons children give for their dislike of certain classics. They often say a book is old-fashioned, boring, talk is strange, unfamiliar language, hard to understand (Wilson 1988).

Children in primary grades tend to prefer adventure, fantasy and mysteries (Row 1968). Adventure and mystery were most often chosen by intermediate grade children (Miller 1966). In intermediate grade children, brighter students chose biography, humor and mystery more frequently than slower students. Students who scored low on reading achievement lacked interest in reading anything. Overall adventure, animals, mystery and sports were most popular (McKay 1971).

In an attempt to determine classification of interests of above average readers in the fourth and sixth grades, bright, average and dull children of the same age all seem to have similar interests, and socio-economic status did not seem to be a factor (Intonato 1989).

Third grade students were studied in an effort to see if their interest were the same as the topics found in their classroom basal readers. Their interests were not in similar

proportions to those in their basals. Third graders favorite genre was adventure, then mystery, fantasy, sports, animals and hobbies in that order (Hanjian 1985).

Boys and girls have similar interests until the age of eight or nine. Differences may begin even earlier (Iarusso 1989). She concludes that by the middle years boys tend to prefer adventure, science, sports and information books, and girls most often choose mystery, romance, home and school, animals and fairytales.

In Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson 1986), it was recommended that two hours a week of independent reading should be expected by grade three or four. That reading should emphasize works that represent the core of our cultural heritage. Children need ready access to books and guidance in choosing them. The amount of independent reading is significantly related to gains in reading.

Teacher Influence on Literature Choices

In a study by Gloria Blatt (1981) children kept records of what they read. Teachers who were most successful in fostering interest in reading, gave children time to read, used literature to teach reading and read aloud to the class (Blatt 1981).

Nistler (1987) indicates that children who listen to stories read aloud become aware of story components such as plot, character, theme and conflict. This helps

comprehension because children are able to make better predictions about what will come next when they read for themselves. Nistler thinks that more teachers would be motivated to read aloud in the classroom if they were informed of the specific benefits it brings.

In one study interviewers talked with over 200 adults to determine influences on their reading. Parents who enjoyed and valued reading produced like children. These families tend to be warm and loving. Non-readers remembered their families did other things such as sports or chores. These adults remembered school as a place to be endured until recess (Locklidge, 1987)

Teachers should provide a role model as a person who loves reading if they expect to influence children to develop a love of reading. The teacher could model this enthusiasm by reading aloud every day. This would show students that reading was valued and enjoyed by the teacher and the student would learn to associate reaading with pleasure. Motivating children to become life-long readers by modeling a love of reading was more effective than preaching about the joys of reading (Perez 1986).

Koeller (1981) says that using children's literature in elementary reading has been a theme of articles in The Reading Teacher for twenty-five years. That is the best way to build children's enthusiasm for reading. She states that there is a positive relationship between the number of books

a student has read, and that student's comprehension and attitude. Koeller says that more teachers should read aloud in all grades in order to tempt children to read more on their own.

Eldredge and Butterfield (1986) agree. They studied five approaches to reading instruction to see how effective they were compared to the traditional basal reading approach. Their findings indicate a positive effect on students' achievement and attitudes when children's literature was used for instruction (Eldredge 1986).

In a study by Morrow (1983) eighty-one percent of children who had a high interest in reading literature came from classrooms whose literature programs were rated good or excellent. Eighty-two percent of children who had a low interest in reading came from classrooms whose literature programs were rated fair or poor.

Another study by Morrow determined that children's behavior and attitudes toward voluntary reading could be changed by a program of regular literature activities and the use of classroom library corners. While teachers read aloud, discussed stories, told stories and used literature in content area lessons, a student's selection of the literature center increased significantly (Morrow 1985).

Attitude was the top priority in reading, in a survey of 101 primary teachers. Yet very little time is spent on attitude development (Alexander 1984). Teachers must be

aware of the vulnerability of children to teacher expectations and be sure they are using positive motivation in their reading programs (Brophy and Good 1970).

Summary

Reading shouldn't be thought of as just a skill subject. It's hard to imagine a kindergarten child being considered literate for his age who didn't know Goldilocks and the Three Bears or Peter Rabbit. For each age there are fables, fairy tales, folk tales, classic and modern works of fiction and nonfiction that make up the core of our cultural heritage (Anderson 1986).

A desire to read can be instilled by advertising: repeated daily commercials by singing new praises, extolling new tastes (Trelease 1989). Nothing sells in this culture without advertising. Reading aloud is its own best advertisement. It can promise new choices and develop new tastes. Oral reading works in school as well as in the home, and is a pleasure for reader and listener (Trelease 1989).

Reading the stories and books of our culture can develop a young child into a reader and into a literate adult because it provides a deep foundation of knowledge and understanding necessary for communication. The pleasure of reading continues because reading answers a need for enjoyment and understanding (Lukens 1986).

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APPENDIX

Table II

Genre of Children's Choices and the Number of Each Chosen Per Week

Week	Adv.	Ftsy.	Mys.	Non-F.	Ptry.	Real-F.	Trad.
11 -	1	0	1	4	1	3	1
10 -	0	3	0	4	1	3	1
9 -	0	1	1	5	0	5	1
8 -	0	0	3	2	1	3	1
7 -	3	2	0	3	1	1	2
6 -	1	2	2	4	1	1	2
5 -	2	2	1	6	0	1	1
4 -	1	1	3	3	0	0	4
3 -	1	1	1	5	0	2	3
2 -	1	2	1	7	1	0	1
1 -	1	2	2	6	0	0	2
Totals	11	16	15	49	6	19	19
Baseline Choices	1	1	2	6	1	2	0